DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 109 161 TM 004 608

AUTHOR Galfo, Armand; Ries, Roger
TITLE The Virginia Beach 45-15 School Year: Administrators' and Supervisors' Reactions.
PUB DATE Oct 74
NOTE 10p.; For related documents, see TM 004 605-607 and EA 007 069-072

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Problems; *Administrator Attitudes; Educational Change; Elementary Education; *Experimental Programs; Interviews; Program Effectiveness; *Year Round Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Virginia Beach 45 15 Pilot Program

ABSTRACT

Virginia Beach School System administrators and supervisors were personally interviewed about their reactions to the first year of the 45-15 plan where students attend school 45 days and break 15 days year round. Opinions were expressed about the increase and utilization of space, problems of maintaining proportional enrollments, rising time demands, need for more secretarial staff to do record keeping, problems in multi-age grouping, improvement in discipline, attitudes of teachers and students, reactions of the public, the need to keep transient populations informed about the program, and identifying hidden costs. Strong consensus was lacking on many of these issues, as was agreement as to whether the 45-15 plan is a better plan than the traditional school. At this time it is recommended that the entire school system should not adopt the 45-15 plan. (BJG)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED109161

TM 004 608

The Virginia Beach 45-15 School Year: Administrators' and Supervisors' Reactions

The purpose of the study was to assess the opinions of Virginia Beach school administrators' and supervisors' regarding the 45-15 plan after one year of operation. The study focused upon: (1) administration and supervision; (2) instruction; (3) morale; and (4) community relations. These four categories where chosen by the investigators since the Virginia Beach School Board in deciding whether to continue, extend, or terminate the 45-15 year-round pilot school plan was particularly interested in the overall cost of the 45-15 program. Additionally, the Board was concerned about the effects of the program on administration and instruction, and community reaction. Specific questions that were to be answered by the study were:

1. What aspects of 45-15 presented unique problems to the administrators?
2. Were the problems a product of the pilot program or are they inherent to 45-15 as experienced by the Virginia Beach School System?
3. What measures were taken or could be taken to alleviate the problems?
4. What did the administrators see as positive values of 45-15?
5. Which were the positive and negative aspects of 45-15 that were most consistantly discussed by the administrators as a group?
6. Which aspects of 45-15 seemed to be controversial among the administrators in terms of inconsistent and incompatable views?

Procedure

Twenty Virginia Beach School System administrators and supervisors were personally interviewed using a semi-structured technique. After being asked to be completely candid about their own evaluation of the 45-15 pilot program, each individual was asked to begin with a "gut" reaction to any or all of the four areas of concern (administration, instruction, morale, and community relations) in terms

of positive and negative feelings. As the interviewee expressed his or her major feelings, the researchers probed to determine if the initial reactions were based on first hand knowledge and experiences or from hearsay evidence. Following this initial phase, questions were asked concerning areas which may not have been covered in the subjects' spontaneous reactions.

The particular method used proved valuable for several reasons:

1. Since the purpose of the study was to focus on opinions and feelings, the immediate "gut" reaction provided a way to estimate the areas of the subjects major interest and concerns with the program.

2. A number of potentially important factors, that evidently had not been studied in the pilot program, emerged which might have been diverted by the interviewers had a more structered approach been taken.

Findings

In this section of the report data are presented regarding the various facets of the 45-15 plan which were studied from the viewpoint of the administrators interviewed.

Administration and Supervision

Overall, the administrative and supervisory personnel interviewed felt that the 45-15 year-round school plan undoubtly increased available space. Some believed that as much as 33 1/3% additional space was made available under the 45-15 pilot program. It was generally agreed by all the principals, the superintendent of schools and several of his immediate staff that the 45-15 project had allowed a delay in building one elementary school. However, several central administrators volunteered that it was extremely difficult to completely utilize this additional space due to the uneven enrollments in the four cycles. The inability of school personnel to maintain proportional enrollments in the four cycles is apparently due to the mobile population characteristic of Virginia Beach

and the Virginia Beach School Board's guarantee to the public that family and geographical neighborhood integrity would be maintained.

A negative aspect of the 45-15 pilot program spontaneously mentioned by both administrative and supervisory personnel was the increased demands placed upon the administrative and supervisory staff. All four principals felt that under the 45-15 plan you were actually operating four schools rather than one. The problem most frequently mentioned by interviewees as inherent to the Virginia Beach 45-5 plan was record keeping. Two of the four 45-15 principals mentioned this problem, as did six other people in the central administration.

Six people, including all the 45-15 principals said that the program places many more demands on a principal's time to do non-instructionally oriented tasks (including record keeping), but three of the four principals feel that they were able to cope with the problem by delegating more responsibilities to subordinates. Two of the central office people thought that the problem is unique to the pilot program. Suggestions generally included more secretarial staff.

Seven people interviewed said that communications, with the staff especially, as well as with pupils and parents are disrupted by 45-15. For example, orientation sessions for teachers must be conducted in multiple form. The most feasible suggestion which might alleviate the problem seemed to be to set aside one half day at the end of each cycle to allow for all teachers to be present without the pupils.

Several supervisors and one principal said that collecting and redistributing materials, especially for the reading program, placed undue demands on the principal and/or the reading teachers, but two principals felt that good organization; use of aids could or did make the difficulty manageable. In addition several people interviewed felt that there have been unanticipated hidden costs in the 45-15 plan. For example, lower participation by pupils in the cafeteria program, especially in the summer,

has made that operation more expensive. More nurses and speech therapists had to be hired to cover the extended school year.

Undoubtly, the overall view of the interviewees is that the most serious problem experienced during the 45-15 pilot program has been the additional demands placed upon central administrators and their staff, principals, and supervisory personnel. Several central administrators felt that the 45-15 pilot program demanded an unusual degree of organization and administrative flexibility. Coordination of the two programs has been a constant concern. Several administrators mentioned that every decision had to be considered in relation to how it applied to the 45-15 program. To what degree the coordination of the two programs has been successful is controversial. Furthermore, some of the additional demands placed upon the staff appear to be a result of operating under two calendars (45-15 and traditional) and not inherent in the 45-15 plan.

Instruction

This facet of 45-15 in the Virginia Beach project seems to produce much disagreement among the interviewees directly concerned with instruction. Multi-age grouping is a good example of this conflict. By necessity, since fewer teachers for a given grade level are available at any given time, 45-15 in the Virginia Beach pilot project resulted in more and wider ranges of multi-age grouping for instruction. Several principals and supervisors saw this as an absolute plus. Some said that the stigma of multi-age groups is removed by the necessity to do this. In turn, teachers can thereby do what they should be doing; teaching each child at his own level. On the other hand, one principal, several supervisors and a member of the superintendents' staff saw the multi-age groups as a minus--either because it made the teacher's job too difficult or because it upset the parents.

On the positive side, two principals saw an improvement in discipline in the 45-15 schools. One of the principals attributes this to the plan itself; the other believes that enthusiastic teachers attracted by the 45-15 project account for the improvement. In addition, two principals and several supervisers mentioned that students seem to retain more over the shorter fifteen-day vacation as compared to the traditional summer break. Thus, less time had to be spent in review of previous lessons.

One principal and two supervisors felt that the frequent breaks under the 45-15 plan alleviated psychological fatigue which frequently builds up in students in longer instructional programs under traditional calendars. Additionally, one principal believed that the 45-15 plan demanded increased organization on the part of the teacher. He felt this was an asset since it helped teachers become more aware and realistic in formulating short-term instructional goals for their pupils.

Morale

Three people, all principals, who expressed an opinion about pupil reaction to 45-15 agreed that children on the plan seem to like it. One principal said the children like it except when they "get stuck" in the school during the summer.

Eight administrators including the four principals said that teachers like 45-15 but four of these people who had expressed an opinion about staff morale said that those upper grade, departmentalized teachers who had signed on for year-round were tired and not as enthusiastic. Teacher enthusiasm for the plan was tempered somewhat by the comment of one administrator who had handled personnel during the time that 45-15 was instituted. He pointed out that about 30 teachers asked to be transferred out of the projected 45-15 schools. So it would appear that the

voluntary aspects of 45-15 project may account for some of the teacher enthusiasm.

Of the four principals interviewed, one said he saw definite assets to 45-15 and would hate to see it go. Another said she had so many headaches with it that she thought it should be canceled. Interestingly, though, she also said that if it continues as a project, she does not wish to transfer out of the program. The other two principals said they can live with it.

Public Relations

Like instruction, administrator and supervisor assessment of what has happened is mixed. Five people interviewed, the public information officer and the four principals, said that parents seem to be generally neutral with an even split between those who have some feelings about 45-15. These administrators see the public as having adopted a "wait and see attitude" willing to go along with the board on whatever it may decide.

Those interviewees who saw the public as leaning one way or the other gave reasons for these views. Some said they thought that since many parents were military families they like the varied vacation times. They also said that parents feel the children need much less review under the 45-15 all year program. Two people said that parents seem to like the multi-age groupings, but four said parents do not like this aspect of 45-15. Four people also mentioned that parents with students in 45-15 schools and also in the secondary schools were upset with the plan.

The most serious problem with 45-15, as seen by the public relation officer as well as the superintendent and some of his immediate staff, is the need to expend much more time and effort explaining it over and over to new people moving into the city. Since Virginia Beach has a very large transient population, this

becomes a major headache.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The unique problems presented by 45-15 as experienced by the administrators and supervisors interviewed seem to center on: (1) the increased burden that record keeping places on the principals and a few members of the central office staff; and (2) the difficulties with cycling and hidden costs of the program. The first set of problems evidently can, with some adjustments and slight increase in clerical staffs, be overcome. The second set, on the other hand, may require redrawing of school boundries and more busing--at least this seems to be the conclusion of the superintendent and several of his central office staff. If this is so, the costs both in money and potential public reaction must be gauged accurately before 45-15 is adopted school system wide.

Some of the 45-15 problems seem to be by-products of the pilot program, but others appear to be directly related to the program itself. For example, several burdens placed on administrators for record keeping would vanish if the whole system were placed on the program. Other difficulties, however, are brought about simply because, as several people put it, "Its like running four separate schools at once."

Those positive values of Virginia Beach program which were mentioned seemed to be associated with instruction and pupil-teacher morale. But there was no strong consensus on the issues, however, and some points which were given as positive by some people were viewed as negative by others. The troublesome problem here is that if those who see the disputed issues as positive values of 45-15 are correct, then all of the bother which seems to come with the plan may be well worth it. For example <u>if</u> pupils are happier under 45-15, <u>if</u> teachers

like it better, if there are less discipline problems in the schools, if less time is needed for review and if teachers plan better for individualized instructions, then 45-15 may be a better plan than the traditional school--at least for the elementary years.

The problem is that evaluation of the many variables involved in all the ifs may not have been of concern or anticipated, or capable of being measured in the pilot study as drawn up. For example, pupils liking the plan could, conceivably, bring about greater learning, but measuring pupils after one year may not show up the trend. Or pupil contentment with school may not show up as better learning at all now, but pop up much later in the form of fewer student drop outs in the high school or even later. Unfortunately, answers to questions like these require long range studies with no assurance that the results will be fruitful.

The 45-15 pilot program did allow the school system to delay building one building and certainly no one among the supervisors and administrators seem to feel that childrens' learning suffered.

From these observations, the researchers would pose several options as well as one major recommendation for the system. Which options might be taken, of course, as in many cases, must be based on non-researchable value judgements by the board of education and the superintendent of schools. The recommendation, on the other hand, has a more solid basis in terms of what seems to have emerged from one year of the pilot study.

The Recommendation

The entire school system should not to on the 45-15 plan at this time since the administrative and supervisory staff, as a group, is not solidly for such a

move. These people appear to have genuinely attempted to give 45-15 a fair trial. Their evaluation, generally, seems to be that there is not a lot of evidence the plan is better than the traditional school year. To implement 45-15 for the entire system would undoubteldly cause difficulties which with extra effort can be overcome, but there is a feeling that not as much money is saved by the plan as had been anticipated. Also, there may be disruptions of school boundries and other difficulties that could bring about adverse public reactions.

The Options

Many questions regarding the instructional value of 45-15 have not been, and are likely not to be, resolved by the pilot program--even after two years. One option, therefore, would be to continue the pilot study for at least a long enough time to get a handle on possible changes in children achievement and also better to assess their attitudes toward school and discipline. This option, of course requires the Board of Education to judge if it is worth it to continue the extra effort involved in order to answer the "if" questions posed earlier--knowing full well that nothing any more positive than what has happened up to now may be the only result.

Another option would be to allow the 45-15 pilot to run its course for this year, but continue a long range follow-up study of pupils who have been exposed to it to determine if their attitudes toward school and academic achievement differ from that of pupils in traditional programs.

The final option is to cancel all 45-15 activities at the end of this school year and make whatever measurements and comparisons that can be made at the end of the 1974-75 school year.